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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TASHKENT 001345

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DEPT FOR SCA/CEN AND DRL

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [UZ](#)

SUBJECT: HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH EFFECTIVELY CLOSES

REF: A. TASHKENT 1146

[1](#)B. TASHKENT 830

[1](#)C. TASHKENT 1061

Classified By: CDA BRAD HANSON FOR REASONS 1.4 (B, D).

[1](#)1. (c) Summary: Human Rights Watch's (HRW) office in Tashkent will effectively close on July 22 with the expected departure of Mira Rittman, the last remaining expatriate HRW staff member in Uzbekistan. Rittman received a letter from the Ministry of Justice on June 14 informing her without explanation that she had been denied accreditation (ref A). Despite lobbying efforts by the U.S. in Washington and Tashkent, the E.U. and several E.U. embassies in Tashkent, it does not appear likely that the Government will reconsider its decision. With Rittman's departure, HRW's office will be effectively closed until a new country director is selected, most likely in September. Despite Government claims that they have agreed with HRW to consider new candidates for HRW country director as soon as possible, we believe it is unlikely that any more HRW staff will be granted visas until after the expected presidential elections in December. End summary.

ACCREDITATION DENIAL FOR LAST HRW EXPATRIATE

[1](#)2. (C) Human Rights Watch's (HRW) office in Tashkent will effectively close on July 22 with the expected departure of Mira Rittman, the last remaining expatriate HRW staff member in Uzbekistan. Rittman received a letter from the Ministry of Justice on June 14 informing her without explanation that she had been denied accreditation (ref A). Despite lobbying efforts by the U.S. and several E.U. embassies in Tashkent, it does not appear likely that the Government will reconsider its decision. Barring any late breaking reversal on the GOU's part, Rittman will depart Uzbekistan on July 22, the same day her visa expires. With her departure, HRW's office will be effectively closed until a new country director is selected, most likely in September. The office is also currently staffed by an Armenian national, but she will leave Uzbekistan with Rittman.

CONTINUATION OF HRW'S WOES

[1](#)3. (C) The denial of accreditation for Rittman is only the latest woe for HRW in Uzbekistan. In April, the Ministry of Justice refused to renew the accreditation of HRW's country director, German citizen Andrea Berg. However, after interventions by the German Ambassador, the German Foreign Minister, and the Chairman-in-Office of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the Government

quickly reversed its decision, granting Berg a three-month extension (ref B). This decision came shortly before the European Union's May 14 decision to prolong its sanctions against Uzbekistan, and Western diplomats in Tashkent viewed the move as a political gesture aimed at the EU. Berg left Uzbekistan shortly after the sanctions decision, ostensibly for health reasons, but convinced that she would soon be expelled.

#### U.S. AND E.U. LOBBYING EFFORTS

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14. (C) In a last ditch effort to ask the Government to reconsider its decision, Charge d'Affaires requested a meeting on July 20 with First Deputy Foreign Minister Ilkhomjon Nematov, but was offered a meeting with MFA Department for UN and International Organization Affairs Chief Ilkhom Zakirov, who has been dealing with HRW issues. Zakirov said that he knew the specifics of Rittman's case well, as he helped organize Human Rights Watch Europe and Central Asia Division Executive Director Holly Cartner's week-long trip to Uzbekistan in late May and early June (ref C). Zakirov said that during Cartner's meetings with Government officials, the GOU agreed to consider new candidates for Berg's position as soon as possible. He said that his Government is ready to cooperate with HRW, but they have not yet received any proposal for a new candidate from HRW. In regards to Rittman's case, Zakirov said that he would seek a clarification, but he doubted that the Government would reconsider its decision, adding that it has been "fixed." He did not know why the Ministry of Justice had refused her accreditation. He noted the GOU had cooperated with HRW for ten years and that the only other Central Asian country with a HRW office is Kazakhstan. The Charge stated it was very hard to understand this GOU

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decision effectively closing down HRW activity in Uzbekistan and said it would reflect very poorly on Uzbekistan outside the country. Earlier in separate meetings, Charge d'Affaires asked Foreign Minister Norov, Deputy Foreign Minister Anvar Salikhbaev, Deputy Foreign Minister Ilkhomjon Nematov and MFA U.S. Division Chief Tokhir Mamadjanov to reconsider the Government's decision on HRW accreditation.

15. (C) On July 19, Charge d'Affaires discussed Rittman's accreditation with Czech Ambassador Ales Fojtik and German Charge Rudi Bohn. On the same day, the Czech Ambassador, accompanied by the French Ambassador and the German Charge (the other 2/3 of the EU troika in Tashkent), had his first meeting as EU presidency representative with Deputy Foreign Minister Nematov. The Czech Ambassador told Charge that the first part of the meeting with Nematov went fine, but that the meeting quickly soured as soon as human rights were raised. The Czech Ambassador specifically asked about Human Rights Watch associate Mira Rittman's denial of accreditation. Nematov said that Human Rights Watch was an "excellent" organization, but the problem is with the people who worked for it. He then criticized former HRW Country Director Andrea Berg by name. Nematov also reprimanded the Czech Ambassador for having raised human rights in his very first meeting as acting EU representative. Shortly afterwards, Nematov ended the meeting and walked out.

16. (C) German Charge Bohn characterized the meeting with Nematov as the lowest point atmospherically his Embassy has had with the Government during the last few months. He believes that the Government is trying to show its displeasure over the extension of EU sanctions despite the dialogue it has engaged in with the EU over human rights and Andijon. Bohn also said that he has not been able to meet with the Ministry of Justice regarding Rittman's case, as the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs keep bouncing him back and forth.

17. (C) French Ambassador Jean-Bernard Harth also confirmed

the gist of the EU Troika's meeting to Charge on July 20. He confirmed that the Czech Ambassador was acting under instructions from Brussels. Harth added that the tone of the meeting as soon as it turned to discussions of human rights was nasty with Nematov stating he had "no time to waste" on this issue. That part of the meeting reminded Harth of a very stormy meeting in July 2005 when EU Ambassadors were convoked by then Foreign Minister Ganiev and severely admonished for their governments' misunderstanding of and actions in regards to Andijon. Harth feared there would be no more EU/GOU human rights discussions for some time. He also informed Charge the EU had decided its next review of Uzbek sanctions would be October 15, not November 15.

COMMENT

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18. (C) The effective closure of Human Rights Watch is most unfortunate, considering the quality of the human rights reporting the organization has produced over the course of its ten years in Uzbekistan. By denying visas and accreditation to staff, the Government is able to prevent HRW from conducting reporting inside Uzbekistan and to simultaneously maintain that HRW remains a registered organization. Despite Zakirov's claim that the Government has agreed to consider proposals from HRW for new country directors, we believe that it is unlikely that any successor to Berg will be granted an Uzbek visa until after the expected presidential elections in December.

HANSON